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Attitudes to English as a language for international development in rural Bangladesh

Elizabeth J. Erling, Philip Seargeant, Mike Solly,
Qumrul Hasan Chowdhury and Sayeedur Rahman

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Abstract

The high status of English within a global economy of languages has meant that English language education is increasingly being promoted in international development initiatives. This is despite the fact that it may seem more valuable for the estimated 1.4 billion people living in poverty in the world to focus development initiatives on the lowering of infant mortality rates, clean water supply, access to electricity, and the provision of basic education, for example. A reason for the promotion of English language education in development contexts is in part a response to a growing conviction that English language education can play an important role in helping people gain the resources to lift themselves out of poverty and increase their ability to participate in the world economic systems from which they have previously been excluded. Despite the strong associations often made between the English language and development, there is, however, only limited evidence showing a relationship between the two. A first step in understanding this impact is an understanding of perceptions and expectations of English learning for personal and national development, and this research project investigates these in two rural communities in Bangladesh. Through the use of an ethnographic survey of two rural areas, it studies the needs and aspirations of the local community in order to better understand perceptions of whether and if so how English-language education could productively contribute to development as part of a wider programme of social and economic support.

Introduction

The focus of this report is the status of English and English language education as part of international development initiatives in Bangladesh¹. The learning of English has had a central and often contentious role in the educational curriculum of many developing countries throughout much of the 20th and early 21st centuries (Erling and Seargeant, 2012). Sometimes the pressure for the teaching and learning of English within a country has come from outside of the country itself. Sometimes it has been the result of cultural aspiration and a desire for the acquisition of cultural capital, as well as for other broadly political reasons. However, in the last two decades there has been a significant shift in the stated reasons for learning English, with a growing emphasis on English as a global language and its perceived role in providing access to both economic and social development. In line with shifts in approaches to development – with the improvement of people’s lives being a more general goal rather than economic growth alone – there has been a focus on the role of English learning in accessing information, technology, jobs and education. The increased status of English within a global economy of languages has meant that English language education is being promoted as an important factor in international development initiatives like ‘English in Action’ in Bangladesh and the British Council’s ‘Project English’ in India and Sri Lanka. The discourse adopted to promote such projects and embedded in many of their policy documents often assumes a positive relationship between language and development to be self-evident (Seargeant and Erling, 2011), with an assumption that the perceived economic and social advantages that would flow from language learning would also be self-evident to learners and their parents, even in remote or rural communities. Hard evidence about whether and, if so how, English language development initiatives can support the other development activities spelt out in the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (2000) – such as ending poverty and hunger, providing basic education to all, and improving child and maternal

health – remains, however, difficult to capture (though see the recent collections of essays in Coleman, 2011 and Erling and Seargeant, 2012).

Promoting access to educational opportunity and literacy in rural communities has long been a key focus of development initiatives, and several research studies in the last ten years have explored the role of literacy in processes of poverty reduction, and its importance to people’s capabilities and wellbeing (e.g. Basu, Maddox and Robinson-Pant, 2009; Street, 2001; UNESCO, 2005). Recent research has also begun to explore the link between language use and development and how the languages that people speak (or do not speak) can influence their economic status (e.g. Djité, 2008; Harbert et al., 2009). Much of this research has focused on the economic value of learning English (e.g. Chakroborty and Kapur, 2008; Graddol, 2010), while other studies have examined the symbolic functions that English has for people in development contexts as part of their aspirations for the future (e.g. Hornberger, 2002; Tembe and Norton, 2011; Vavrus, 2002).

Recognising the symbolic allure of English, Tembe and Norton (2008) argue that language learning projects in development contexts must be carefully aligned with community needs and aspirations. They suggest that ethnographic research approaches can be used to align education programmes with local ideologies and learners’ aspirations. Such approaches have been explored in recent adult literacy education initiatives in several development contexts, including Bangladesh. The architects of such programmes argue that by taking into account community knowledge and practices, such initiatives are more effective in increasing people’s access to resources, as they combine literacy teaching with the acquisition of other relevant skills for community livelihoods (e.g. saving and credit, health and family planning) (Street, Rogers and Baker, 2006; Rogers, Hunter and Uddin, 2007). In line with recent approaches which conceive of development as freedom (cf. Sen, 2001),

¹In this report we use the term ‘international development’ to refer to internationally planned, funded and/or executed projects (i.e. those involving two or more countries), while we take the term ‘development’ to refer to locally or nationally planned, funded and executed projects (see Seargeant and Erling, 2012, for fuller discussion of the distinction).

these initiatives aim to empower participants to be agents of their own development. The research reported upon in this study explores how these ethnographic approaches used in literacy education might be adapted to the context of English-language teaching in rural Bangladesh.

Bangladesh (and particularly rural Bangladesh) does not as yet have the same marketable skills as neighbouring India in terms of providing the labour for international industries like call centres. This has been attributed in part to the lack of English competence among its population (see, for example, Khan, 2010). As has been noted elsewhere, it is often rural communities who are in most need of development assistance, and are least likely to have skills in English and opportunities for economic development (cf. Graddol, 2010). Since the 1990s there has been a renewed interest in the role of English in Bangladesh's economic development and several education initiatives have sought to improve English learning across the country, for example the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), which ran from 1997–08, and English in Action (EIA), which is scheduled to run from 2009–17. The goal of EIA is 'to significantly increase the number of people able to communicate in English to levels that will enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities'; it also aims to target rural communities (EIA, 2010). Baseline studies conducted for the project found that 84 per cent of the participants surveyed wished to learn the language, while 87 per cent believed it would help them earn more money (EIA, 2009; this study surveyed 8,300 Bangladeshi about their perceptions of learning English). Evidence of this sort gives a clear picture of a strong general interest in English language education and a belief that English language learning leads to economic development. However, at present little is known about the purposes for which members of rural communities want to learn the language or whether in fact improved skills in English will necessarily provide the imagined opportunities that the participants perceive for themselves. It is for this reason that the current research project investigated the perceived need for and attitudes towards English in rural communities, with the intention being to evaluate the ways in which top-down development initiatives (such as English in Action) are viewed in such contexts, and, if English language learning opportunities are to be provided, what sort of issues these projects need to take into consideration in order to best suit the requirements of such communities.

The research explores the perceived need for and beliefs about English in two rural communities. Building up knowledge of the desires and aspirations of people in a rural development context provides insights into whether and how English language education can best assist the most disadvantaged. Wedell (2008: 628) has remarked that the type of English promoted in development contexts is often largely unsuitable for the priorities and sociolinguistic realities of the communities at which it is targeted. If English language teaching is to remain a focus of development initiatives, because of the perceived need for it, the long-term aim of undertaking such research is to develop a means of English language teaching that has at its core the achievement of real-life goals, set by the participants, which would enhance other development initiatives and have immediate socioeconomic benefits on their lives and communities.

The current research also explores a means of gaining insight into community needs and beliefs about language. Language learning programmes rooted in an understanding of the local community can help participants gain awareness of language issues in society which will support them in making the sort of choices that can offer them the greatest opportunities for their own development.

Context: Rural Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a South Asian country with a population of approximately 142.3 million (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Due to its geography, the country frequently experiences natural disasters such as cyclones and floods, and is also threatened by climate change and global warming hazards. It is a mainly rural nation, with recent statistics indicating that 76 per cent of the population reside in the countryside and 24 per cent in urban areas, though the number of people living in urban areas is rising (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2009). It has an agricultural peasant economy, with 75 per cent of the total population involved in farming (Gunaratne, 2000: 41). 88 per cent of the people are Muslim, with Hinduism being a significant minority religion (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

In terms of its developmental context, Bangladesh has acute poverty, a lack of sustainable socio-economic infrastructures, and a low literacy rate (52.7 per cent for women, and 59.4 per cent for men). Although several development initiatives have taken place at both governmental and non-governmental levels, the country still ranks 146th out of 187 in the UNDP Human Development Index, and 50 per cent of the population live below the international poverty line, measured at US\$1.25 per day (UNDP, 2011; UNICEF, 2010).

Regarding the linguistic situation, Bangladesh was historically born from the tragic struggle over the language politics centred around Bangla nationalism. The vast majority of the population (85 per cent) are classified as speakers of the national language, Bangla (Lewis, 2009), but there is also a significant number of minority variety speakers, particularly

in rural areas and among Bangladesh's ethnic minorities (Hossain and Tollefson, 2007: 243). Bangla acts as a strong marker of secular national identity due to the nation-binding role it had in the pre-independence era, and since independence in 1971 the country has attached great importance to the language (Thompson, 2007). However, English has continually had a presence in the country due to British colonial history in the area, and the language's subsequent emergence as a global force with a high instrumental value in various domains (Imam, 2005). The status of English in the country can either be characterised as that of a second or foreign language, depending on the domains in which it is encountered (Kachru, 1994). Crystal (2003: 62) estimates that there are approximately 3,500,000 English speakers in Bangladesh, which works out to be 2.66 per cent of the total population. English is a compulsory academic subject from primary to higher secondary level and, in some cases, in higher education as well (Rahman, 2005).

The country is presently aiming to promote a shift in its economic structure from agriculture to manufacturing and to deepen integration with global markets (World Bank, 2007). Such developments call for a sound proficiency in English (Rahman, 2005). People who live in rural areas under or around the poverty line are likely to find such requirements particularly challenging due to the poor quality and limitations of education (including English teaching) in such areas. It is within this context, therefore, that the present study aims to survey and analyse the perceptions of members of two geographically and linguistically different rural areas about the role of English in their lives and its perceived contribution to economic and social development.

The two rural communities: Toke and Shak Char

The two areas that the study focuses upon are Toke and Shak Char. Both are what are known as 'Unions', and are under the jurisdiction of the Kapasia Upazila (in the Gazipur District) and Lakshmipur Sadar Upazila (in the Lakshmipur District) respectively (an upazila is a subdistrict in the administrative division system of Bangladesh) (see Figures 1 and 2 for the location of these districts within Bangladesh and the location of these upazilas within their districts). The Bangladesh government defines 'Union' as the 'smallest administrative rural geographic unit' (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011: 6). Both Toke and Shak Char are viewed as rural according to the government's administrative criteria. The discussion below will further elucidate the ways in which they lack the required socio-economic amenities to be called urban.

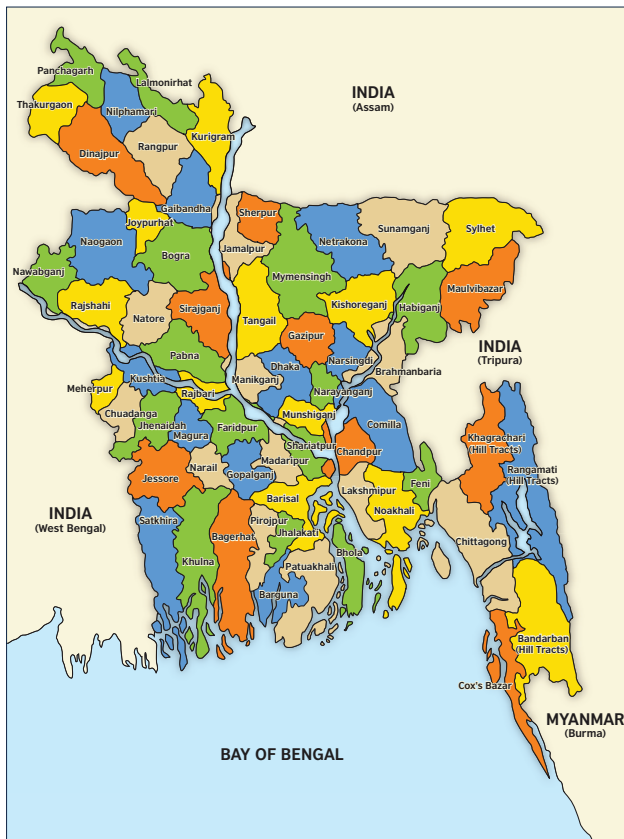


Figure 1: Map of Bangladesh

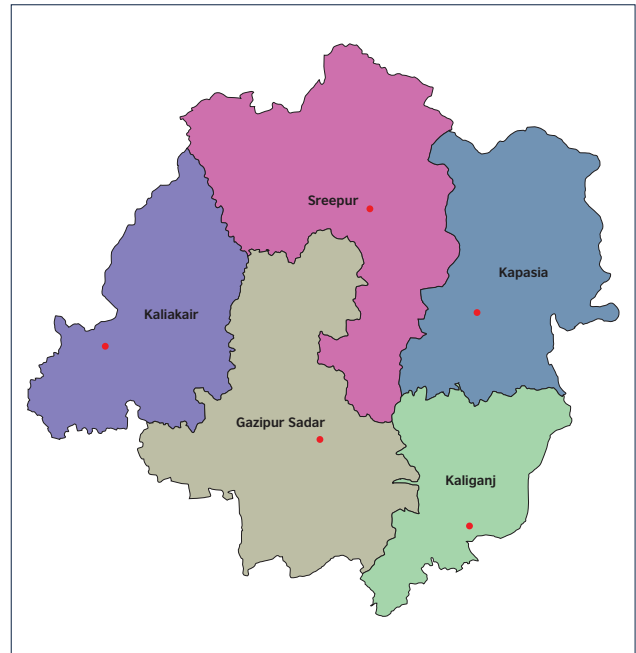


Figure 2: District Map – Gazipur

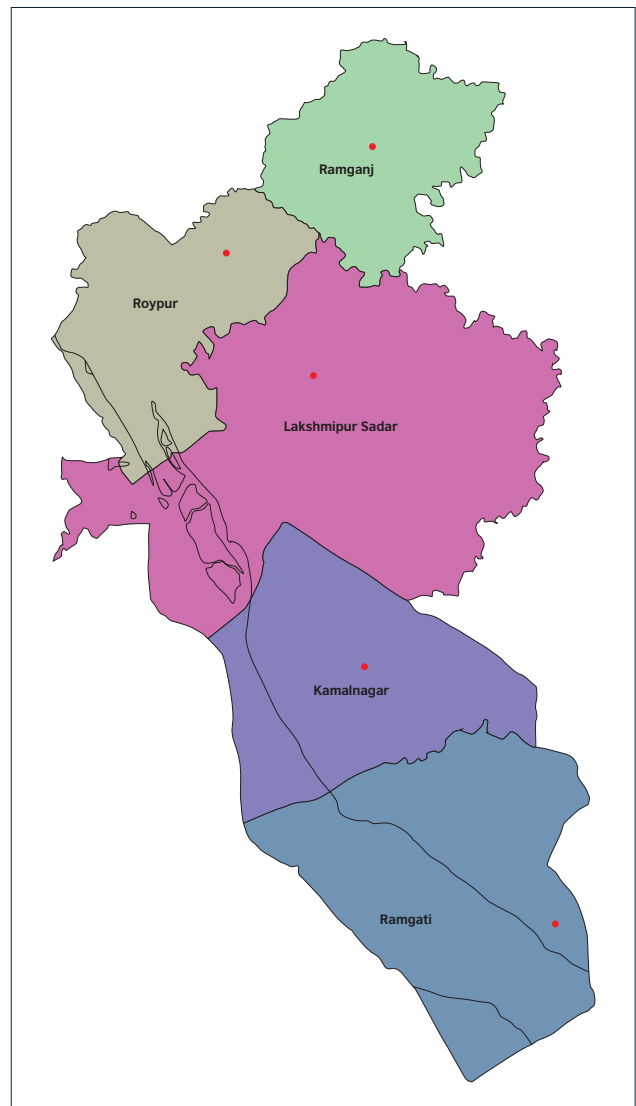


Figure 3: District Map – Lakshmipur

Toke

Toke is situated in the middle-eastern part of Bangladesh. The Union is 80 kilometres away from the capital city Dhaka and 19 kilometres from the higher administrative unit, Kapasia Upazila. The total population of Toke is 37,669 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001). The area depends on agriculture for its economy and has hardly any industry. Most of the people are farmers who grow rice, jute, sugarcane and oil seeds, though poultry farming is also increasing in popularity. There are also some fish traders, potters, blacksmiths, rickshaw-pullers, van-pullers and small-scale merchants and grocers. Currently, white collar work opportunities are very rare, except for professions such as teachers, NGO workers and bankers. However, given that Toke is fairly close to Dhaka, people often go there in pursuit of better work opportunities, for example in the garment industry. Finally, a large number of local people have emigrated to various middle-eastern and European countries where they work and send remittances to their families.

The overall educational situation in Toke is similar to Bangladesh as a whole, with a literacy rate of 44.02 per cent. There are 21 primary schools, seven secondary schools and one college for higher-secondary education in the area. In addition there are several madrasas which provide Islamic religious education. Students who wish to pursue higher education go either to Gazipur district town or to Dhaka. Even though the enrolment rate for educational institutions has looked encouraging in recent years, the dropout rate is high. Literacy initiatives undertaken either at the governmental or non-governmental level are minimal. Other NGOs operating in Toke such as BRAC, ASA, Proshika and Grameen Bank work for poverty reduction mostly through their micro credit schemes, but currently have very few educational initiatives.

The socio-economic infrastructure of Toke is very limited. Houses are mostly made of clay, straw and bamboo; most of the roads are mud roads, and people usually rely on walking for most journeys. People often use three-wheeler, non-motorised vehicles such as rickshaws for commuting. There are three banks and a few NGOs which operate their businesses in the area. There are eight market places where people buy and sell essential commodities, like fruit, vegetables and fish. Mobile phone servicing centres and computer/internet shops have recently mushroomed in these market places. Market places, and especially their tea-stalls, also provide people an opportunity to meet up and chat with each other (see Figure 4 for a photo taken in Toke Noyon Bazaar).



Figure 4: Woman selling rice cakes at the market in Toke

The role that English plays in the area at present is limited almost entirely to the academic domain. The main language in Toke is Bangla, and there is no other dominant regional variety. English teachers from different educational institutes offer private tuition at their homes and/or in coaching centres. Everyday discourse is in Bangla except on the few occasions when local people need to talk with foreigners (mostly the donors and officials from NGOs). One can hear some English words being mixed with Bangla in daily conversation, either for the purposes of better communication or to convey symbolic prestige. English words are also used extensively on signage. For example, one can see signs such as 'Renaissance Multimedia School and Coaching Centre', 'A Four Rent-A-Car', 'Ekram Multipurpose Co-operative Society Limited' and so on (see Figure 5 for examples). Children learn Arabic for religious purposes at the Maqtabas, which are usually mosque-based Arabic and Islamic religious tuitions centres. Hindu temples similarly offer religious education. Most people understand at least some Hindi, as Hindi programmes from Indian TV channels as well as Bollywood movies are very popular.



Figure 5: Use of English in shop signs in Toke

Shak Char

The second area in which the research was carried out was Shak Char, a Union under Lakshmipur Sadar Upazila in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. Shak Char is 14 kilometres away from Lakshmipur Sadar Upazila and 198 kilometres from Dhaka. It has a population of 50,349 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Its proximity to the River Meghna and its geographical position make it vulnerable to natural disasters such as cyclones and floods: in 1991, 2007 and 2009 it was severely affected by major cyclones in the area, and is regularly affected by flooding.

Shak Char is socio-economically behind Toke in many respects. Agriculture is the basis of the economy, and farming is thus the major occupation. The main crops are rice, betel nut, betel leaf, coconut, bananas and seasonal vegetables. Other occupations include potters, blacksmiths, fishermen, bus drivers, and Imams (priests), and there are fewer white collar work opportunities than in Toke.

Shak Char is characterised by underdevelopment, a lack of infrastructure and poor health and sanitation facilities. The only major establishments with a presence there are the Union Parishad Office and a few NGO offices; there are no banks or other financial organisations. The roads are mostly made of mud, and except for some three-wheeler auto-rickshaws there are no public transportation facilities (see Figure 6). Most of the houses are made of coconut leaves, betel nut leaves, bamboo and clay. NGOs such as BRAC, Grameen Bank and Proshika work to eradicate poverty by providing microcredit loans to the local people. Unlike Toke, there are very few mobile phone/computer shops, and people are less exposed to new technologies.



Figure 6: Street view of the road to Shak Char

The overall picture in terms of literacy and educational initiatives is dismally poor in Shak Char. The literacy rate is 33.53 per cent. Along with this low rate, there is also a lack of educational institutions. In total, there are five primary schools, one lower secondary school, one secondary school and one madrasa in the area. Students who wish to proceed to higher secondary education or further education depend on Lakshmipur Sadar or, in a few cases, Dhaka.

Religion appears to be an important part of the culture of Shak Char. Lakshmipur and its neighbouring district Noakhali are generally known to observe Islamic practices very strictly. During the fieldwork, the researchers recorded that most of the women wore the *hijab* and the men covered their heads with *tupi* caps.

Most people speak in a local dialect common to south-eastern Bangladesh (Lewis, 2009, Maniruzzaman, 1994). They use this with friends and relatives both in the home and at the bazaar. Priests in the mosques also give their sermons in this variety. Bangla is spoken in formal domains like schools, courts and offices, however. There is less use of English in everyday settings than there is in Toke, and there is also a limited presence of English on signs. There are no English language training or coaching centres either as part of governmental or non-governmental initiatives. However, in some cases local English language teachers offer private tuitions from their own homes. Given that there is a lack of English language teachers in Shak Char, a good number of students also travel to Lakshmipur Sadar to take private tuition. As in Toke, children learn Arabic at the maktabas and many people understand Hindi.

In summary, then, even though Toke and Shak Char share a great deal in terms of a common socio-economic and demographic background, they are also marked by different geophysical, educational and sociolinguistic features. Toke has the better infrastructural and socio-economic development and a higher literacy rate, while Shak Char is more poverty-stricken and at greater risk from natural disasters. Taken together, however, the two places are representative of rural and semi-rural Bangladesh and for this reason were chosen as the context for the research project.

Methodology

In this section we detail the methodology used in collecting and analysing the data. For this research we adopted an ethnographically-based approach in order to create local case studies which create a picture of the status of English within the targeted communities. The case studies were built using the following techniques: (1) field notes, (2) semi-structured interviews with members of the community, and (3) photographs. The two locations outlined above were selected on the basis of their having different language ecologies and environmental contexts, and also posing a different set of developmental challenges. Undertaking the study in two distinctly different rural areas of Bangladesh thus provided indications of the divergent factors that affect attitudes across the communities, and the strength of those factors as they manifest at a local level. The two Bangladeshi researchers collected data in multiple ways during an extended field visit of five days in each site, where they also recorded their insights into the geographic, socio-economic, cultural and linguistic particularities of the community. Below we summarise some of the key elements that were involved in the collection of the data.

Establishing rapport

The two-person Bangladeshi-based research team had a pre-existing familiarity with the linguistic and socio-economic characteristics of rural Bangladesh, and both members had been brought up close to one of the research areas. Their cultural knowledge of the environment, along with their verbal repertoire in standard Bangla and the local dialects helped them to communicate with the community members. To the participants, being interviewed and recorded by strangers was a new experience and therefore it was very important for the field researchers to establish a good rapport with them, and to reassure them about the nature and purpose of the research process. The following are select examples of how the researchers undertook to do this.

In Toke on the first day, a cricket match was taking place on the local college field. This occasion gave the researchers a chance to introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the research, and during the event they met many potential participants. Following on from this, daily informal conversations with local community members helped them to familiarise

themselves with the setting of the area. Furthermore, the researchers' profession as teachers (they both have positions in universities in Bangladesh) was another advantage, as in most rural villages teachers (mastersaab) are usually held in high esteem.

The experience in Shak Char was markedly different, and in many ways it was more challenging. The locals appeared both curious and suspicious of the researchers' actions when taking pictures, writing notes and interviewing people. The local guide had no real influence in the community and did little to explain the reasons for the researchers' visit. On the first day little progress was made. The researchers surveyed the area and found the local market place where people of all professions gather in the evening to talk and read the newspaper over a cup of tea. The following day they returned there and sought out the local leader, who became the first person to participate in the interviews. As time went on, the process became easier. By the second day they were no longer being viewed as strangers, and the research process could begin in earnest.

Semi-structured interviews

The main element of the research was the interviews with members of the two communities. The interviews were structured around a number of key topics derived from an analysis of discourse of English as a language for international development in Bangladesh, which has shown that English is often equated with economic value, technology and education (Seargeant and Erling, 2011). These topics included the participants' perceptions of and attitudes towards the importance of education in general and English-language learning, and the significance this has for individual and community development (see Appendix for a copy of the interview schedule).

Certain ethical considerations were important in approaching the interviews, as in both communities many of the participants had low incomes. Considering that many of the participants live below the poverty line, it seemed unethical not to give them a small token of appreciation. While all efforts were made to ensure that such tokens did not distort the research or the community, the researchers were aware that taking part in the interview process meant time spent away from work. A rickshaw-puller, barber

or fisherman, for example, would lose out on the income he would accrue during that hour in which the interview was taking place. The tokens of appreciation did not in any sense compensate for the participants for the loss of income during this time, and yet, despite that, those who volunteered were generous with their time and keen to participate.

Gender issues also needed to be taken into consideration in the research process. While there was an attempt to have equal representation of male and female participants in the data, this proved to be a challenge. In rural communities, women generally prefer not to interact with strangers, which thus raised ethical considerations of privacy and respecting local culture. All interviews with female participants were therefore organised in their home environments and took place in the presence of a male adult family member. Interviews for the rest of participants were conducted in their place of work. Finally, since the education and literacy rates of participants were generally very low, the research relied on oral interviews, and all statements of informed consent were explained orally. Informed consent for use of the data has been confirmed by all participants, and pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity.

The participants

In total, 28 people were interviewed, 23 male and five female participants. They ranged in age from 22 to 62. These participants were chosen in order to represent a range of people in terms of the following variables: profession, age, social class, gender and religion (see Figures 7 and 8). Interviews were undertaken with leaders and representatives of the local community in both areas, as well as people in more 'marginal' positions in society. There was extreme variation in the education levels of the participants, with some of them reporting very limited formal education and virtually no literacy skills apart from the ability to sign their names. Others reported achieving various levels of primary school (grades 1-5), secondary school (grades 6-10) or higher secondary (HSC) (grades 11-12). Several had higher degrees, such as a Diploma, a Bachelor's (BA, BBA, BBS, BSS, BEd) or a Master's (MA, MSc, MBA, MPhil). The religious scholars tended to have completed their education in religious institutes (e.g. madrasah, maqtab, etc.)

Name	Profession	Age	Gender	Education
Gias Uddin	Banker	28	Male	BBA, MBA
Niranjana Sheel	Barber	50	Male	Grade 8
Talib Ahmed	College principal	48	Male	MSc
Ranu Islam	College teacher (Bangla)	42	Female	MA, MPhil
Polash Das	College teacher (English)	35	Male	BA, MA (English)
Faruk Karim	Chairman (elected union representative + politician)	46	Male	HSC
Moshiur	Farmer + village police + seasonal rickshaw puller	36	Male	Grade 7
Monish Dev Barman	Fisherman	51	Male	Limited formal education
Ferdousi Begum	Housewife	32	Female	Secondary School Certificate
Maulana Kalim Uddin	Imam + teacher at maqtab (religious school)	40	Male	Primary + Madrasah
Mufti Abdul Hasan	Imam + Mufti	45	Male	Highest religious degree
Sumon Miah	Rickshaw puller	22	Male	Grade 7
Rafiq	Mobile phone store + poultry business	28	Male	HSC + Certificate in Electronics
Shanto Hawlader	Mobile salesman	28	Male	BBS
Sohel	Student	28	Male	BSS, MSS

Figure 7: Profiles of the Toke participants

Name	Profession	Age	Gender	Education
Devika	Cleaner	35	Female	Grade 8
Harun Khan	Chairman (elected union representative + politician)	48	Male	BA
Momin Khan	Farmer	45	Male	Limited formal education
Shafi Islam	Farmer	62	Male	Limited formal education
Suleiman Shahid	Farmer	60	Male	Limited formal education
Habib Rahman	Fisherman	50	Male	Limited formal education
Maulana Mohammad Golam	Hafez (priest)	27	Male	Equivalent to HSC
Abdul Quddus	Head of junior school	55	Male	BA, BEd
Monohora Rani	Housewife	40	Female	Limited formal education
Minhaz Udiin	Social leader	58	Male	Grade 5
Fakir Ali	Teacher (Islamic Studies) + part time farmer + salesman	30	Male	Equivalent to BA
Saidul Islam	Headmaster of High School	55	Male	BA, BEd
Sushma Bose	Teacher (Agriculture)	27	Female	HSC, Diploma in Agriculture

Figure 8: Profiles of the Shak Char participants

Field notes and photographs

In addition to the interviews, field notes and photographs were taken. Since one of the focuses of the research was to find out and assess how, where and why English was being used in the two rural communities, the researchers took notes whenever they found instances of English on signboards, on t-shirts, in the home, or in people's general conversation (i.e. that which was not recorded as part of the interviews). The taking of photographs helped them capture the material manifestation of English in the lives of the people in the two areas. Both the field notes and the photographs also proved to be a useful aide memoire for researchers when it came to organising and archiving the data.

Data analysis

In analysing the transcribed and translated semi-structured interviews, qualitative content analysis was used (Silverman, 2006). In a first phase, the different sections of the interview schedule were used as broad categories for analysis of the data. Following a grounded approach, we identified thematic connections and patterns across the dataset. In a second phase of analysis, the themes set out in the interview schedule were refined according to the emergent data, and the translated interview transcripts were manually coded accordingly. This manual analysis did not reveal any major differences between the opinions of the community members in the two geographic sites, Toke and Shak Char.

The four major themes explored in the interview data were as follows:

1. English and access to global systems.

This included issues about English and economic value, economic and geographic mobility, employment opportunities and access to the global knowledge economy.

2. English and cultural value/identity.

This included issues regarding the politics of the English language in Bangladesh and the relationship between local and global culture/identities.

3. English and social status.

This included issues about the role of English and the social status of the individual and the nation.

4. Other issues.

This included topics not mentioned in the above three categories, including issues about access and infrastructure.

In this report we discuss these four themes in turn, and provide examples from the data of the opinions and attitudes of the members of the community where the research was undertaken. For each there is a brief summary.

Limitations

When undertaking the data analysis, it became obvious that at times the participants' responses may have been limited by the types of questions that were asked and the ways they were framed. In addition, the data provide only partial insight into other compounding issues along with lack of English that may impede development, such as lack of literacy in the national language. This was likely due in part to the fact that the interview questions were necessarily concentrated on the focus of the study, i.e. perceptions of English, and thus excluded other issues.

Research Findings

English and access to global systems

English was almost universally viewed among the entire cohort as being related to the global knowledge economy and important for employment prospects – both in the local area and elsewhere. There seemed to be no variation in this view, regardless of the location or occupation of the participant. A commonly-voiced reason for learning the language was in order to go abroad to work, not only in Anglophone countries, but also in the Middle East. English was particularly associated with information technology, especially mobile phones and the internet, and also for accessing information about medicines and pesticides, all of which is apparently written in English. Knowledge of English was often equated with knowledge of the Roman script and thus with transliterated Bangla, as well as a familiarisation with the Arabic numeral system and basic numeracy.

English and employment

Regardless of the participants' professions, it was generally seen as accepted wisdom that knowledge of English is needed to get a good job, and that proficiency in the language can bring improved job prospects, and therefore better lives for those living in rural areas:

... no matter what the profession is, if you have a better knowledge of English you can improve your lifestyle. (Niranjan Sheel, Barber, Toke)

There was the impression that knowledge of English can help someone gain employment, particularly in the new industries that are springing up, e.g. office work, technology-related businesses.

You have a better grasp of English then you can get jobs in all the offices that are run in English... Many offices are springing up in our Lakshimpur also. The knowledge of English is going to be a big help. (Shafi Islam, Farmer, Shak Char)

There was a sense that knowledge of English allows people to gain more 'respectable' jobs, and jobs that are easier or require less manual labour and thus provide a more comfortable existence in rural areas:

... people would get better jobs if they knew English. No one would then do the job of digging the earth. People would do mobile business and computer related business etc. Then they would not have to work so hard. (Sumon Miah, Rickshaw puller, Toke)

English was seen as something that can enable people in rural areas to move to Dhaka, where there are presumed to be more employment opportunities and more comfortable living standards:

People would have better work opportunities if they knew English. They could have got better jobs in Dhaka. (Devika, Cleaner, Shak Char)

English was also associated with higher level jobs and positions of authority:

I could be a 'supervisor' or an 'in-charge' if I knew English. Usually, people who know English become a team leader of 4–5 persons. (Moshiur, Farmer, Toke)

Conversely, a lack of English can be seen as inhibiting further business expansion for those living in rural areas:

He who sells fruit does not know English. That's why his income is very limited. If he knew English, then he could do mobile phone related businesses or computer related businesses or could do jobs. (Sumon Miah, Rickshaw puller, Toke)

These responses equate the learning of English with economic progress. Questions about who would sell fruit to locals if everyone were to become a mobile phone salesperson and what would happen to rural areas if everyone were to move to Dhaka for their livelihood remains unexplored. The responses also reflect a sense of socio-economic inequality and a lack of opportunity among certain members of the population. There is a sense that knowledge of English would somehow rectify this imbalance and there is no recognition of the fact that the plight experienced by marginalised people is most probably not caused by their inability to speak English but more likely due to a lack of other skills or because the way that society is structured (Coleman, 2011: 15).

English for working abroad

Most participants felt that knowledge of English aided geographical mobility and many of them gave examples of people they know who went overseas to work. English was seen as the main language needed for working and living abroad, even in countries like the UAE and Malaysia, where other languages function as the national language:

Everyone speaks in English abroad. Everything is in English abroad... Even if you don't know Arabic, if you speak English, local people will understand you. (Momin Khan, Farmer, Shak Char)

There was some recognition of the fact that if someone goes abroad to work, a lack of English knowledge could have severe consequences:

In foreign countries, if you do not know English, you will starve. (Suleiman Shahid, Farmer, Shak Char)

There was a recognition that Bangladeshis who do not speak English and go abroad end up earning less than those who speak English, and doing the lowest level jobs and living in poor conditions:

... people who know English get 'square' work so that they can nicely do their work wearing shirts and pants. If they do not know English, they need to do the filthiest work. If they knew English, they could have earned more. They could have been happy on all sides. (Devika, Cleaner, Shak Char)

While there was a sense that English would provide a practical lingua franca abroad, the need to learn languages like Arabic or Malay for work was not given much prominence in people's replies, which suggests a lack of awareness of the importance of local languages in succeeding abroad (see Chiswick, 2008).

The use of English in local industries

Although the majority opinion was to view English as important for employment prospects, some doubted that any real opportunities for economic betterment presented themselves in the local environment, especially for agricultural workers. For example, Minhaz Uddin, the social leader in Shak Char, says:

... people who are farmers and work in the fields don't need English. Even if they don't know English, they don't have any problem to do their work.

Likewise there were some views expressed that English is not needed for the jobs available in rural areas, only in large businesses located in the capital or abroad:

No, one cannot do anything in this area by knowing English. But English knowledge plays role when one goes to Dhaka, America or Japan. (Devika, Cleaner, Shak Char)

However, many of the participants working in these occupations (particularly farming) made special mention of how knowledge of English would be useful for them, above all in understanding and applying pesticides:

When the company gives us pesticides there is a paper with instructions written in English with it. If I knew English, I could have followed the instructions properly ... If we put in too much in field the crop will be harmed and if we put in too little, the diseases will not be cured... [In regards to two farmers in the area who are educated:] They get better crop yields than the other families here. We can also get a good crop with hard work but they can get a good crop using their education. (Moshiur, Farmer, Toke)

It is also reported that English is needed to gain access to prescriptions:

When the cattle get sick, then the doctors prescribe medicines. What happens is that if you don't know English, you won't know when the date of use of a given medicine expires. Again, when I go to the pharmacies, I face some problems for lacking English. I don't have any option other than bring the medicine home which the vendor gives me. I don't know if this is a good medicine or not. Sometimes the vendor gives wrong medicine... there are lots of dangers if one does not know English. (Momin Khan, Farmer, Shak Char)

Other participants mentioned particular things in the community for which knowledge of English was needed. These included user manuals, shop signs, and information and prices and information on packets for various products.

It is clear that access to such information is vital for the survival and success of people in rural communities. However, instead of insisting that such information should be provided in the language of the majority of the population, Bangla, in most cases people mentioned the need for English. Only Momin Khan (Farmer in Shak Char) noted: 'if doctors wrote in Bangla, then everyone could understand.' But even the provision of such information in Bangla would not help those participants with limited literacy skills in Bangla.

English for computing and mobile phones

The majority of the respondents across the sample associated an ability to operate technology with knowledge of English. This knowledge was often equated with familiarisation with the Roman script and the Arabic numeral system. As the Chairman of Toke Union explains, knowledge of the Roman script is required for most computer use, as it is common to use transliterated Bangla² as well as Arabic numerals³ for typing and texting:

²The Bangla writing system is an abugida, a non-Roman script in which consonant-vowel sequences are written as a unit.

³Bangla has its own numeral system which differs from Arabic numerals.

If people do not have English literacy, then they will not even know the operations of a computer. Even if they want to use the computer in Bangla, they have to do it through English. (Faruk Karim, Chairman, Toke)

There was also an understanding that access to technology equals access to a wealth of knowledge and also to employment, as the following examples show:

If you know about computers you do not have to wait for a job ... Nowadays you can know anything by using computer. If you know English you can easily understand computer. You should not face any problem. (Monohora Rani, Housewife, Shak Char)

Minhaz Uddin, the social leader from Shak Char, was clear that a lack of knowledge of English hinders usage of increasingly ubiquitous IT products (such as mobile phones) and he explained how his own English has aided others in comprehending aspects of mobile phone usage.

There were, however, those who noted that one can still operate technology without English:

There are many persons who don't know English but can still do the work in mobile phones as they have memorised the applications... After using mobile phones for a long time, one starts understanding these... but if one is educated then it becomes easier. (Momin Khan, Farmer, Shak Char)

Monish Dev Barman, a fisherman in Toke, is a good example of someone who can operate technology without having basic literacy. As he reports, he has a mobile phone but does not send or receive text messages, as he cannot read them in whatever language they are in (regardless of whether it was Bangla, transliterated Bangla, or English). If he receives text messages, he cannot read them and has to go to someone else for help in reading them, but as he does not like to do this, these messages remain unread.

While more sophisticated computer applications using Bangla script exist, these are difficult to operate within the constraints of commonly available technology. So what is perceived as a need for English by many of the participants is actually a need for gaining multiliteracies in Bangla as well as familiarity with technology. In a similar way, the English language is often equated with knowledge of Arabic numerals: for example, Suleiman Shahid (Farmer in Shak Char) reported that vendors at the market take advantage of those who don't speak English by charging more than the standard price printed on a product's packaging. However, it is not necessarily English but knowledge of Arabic numerals (and the ability to equate them with Bangla numerals) that would prevent someone like Suleiman Shahid from being at a disadvantage when buying products at the local market.

Summary

In summary the perception across the cohort was that knowledge of English offers access to global systems, including technology, better employment opportunities, and work abroad. In addition there are several perceived specific needs for English in the local community, including its use to understand the application of pesticides and medicines, the need for knowledge of Roman script and Arabic numerals for understanding prices on packaging and shop signs, and the sending and receiving of text messages in transliterated Bangla. However, many of the examples cited may indicate, not a need for English, but rather a need for further access to literacy and numeracy in general, or a need for the provision of essential information in the national language. Despite this, even in those professions where some people voice doubts about the usefulness of English (e.g. farming), many of the people actually working in these fields express a desire to learn the language, for practical or other reasons (see below).

English and cultural value/identity

The second category focused on the relationship between local and global culture and identities among the participants, including whether the presence of English in society is perceived to have a detrimental effect on Bangla language or on local cultural and religious values. Again, opinions about the relationship between English and cultural values were almost unanimous across the cohort, with no one suggesting that the language was harmful to the local culture. No perceived problems in learning English were expressed and no sense of fear that the national language, culture or religion would be lost or corrupted by learning English, as this example demonstrates:

... we are Bangladeshi. We speak Bangla. For job, technology, and for going abroad English helps a lot; however it does not have any negative effect on our language. (Shanto Hawlader, Mobile salesman, Toke)

There seemed to be a very strong confidence in the nature and integrity of the local national culture, and the role that Bangla plays in this:

Monish: We all are Bangladeshi. We always speak in Bangla. We have to speak in Bangla regardless of how much English we have learnt.

Researcher: Is it possible to forget Bangla?

Monish: No, it's not possible (smile).

Researcher: Why?

Monish: We have always spoken in Bangla. English comes later but Bangla is before everything. (Monish Dev Barman, Fisherman, Toke)

Or:

Bangla is our language. No one will be able to take it away ... (Shafi Islam, Farmer, Shak Char)

There was also the idea that English can be used as a medium for promoting the local culture:

If we know English, we can invite the foreigners into our local cultural programmes. Then the foreigners can know about our culture. We can present our culture to the rest of the world through English. (Rafiq, Mobile phone sales, Toke)

English as an Islamic language

There were similar opinions expressed about religion, with the majority of respondents saying that the increasing presence of English in society would have no negative influence on religious practices and beliefs. This was nicely expressed by Suleiman Shahid (Farmer, Shak Char):

If you are true, then your religious practices will not be negatively influenced.

Some respondents mentioned that such attitudes might have been commonly found in the past, but they no longer are:

A very small group of people once thought that English can have debilitating effect on our religious practices and cultures. But now such attitudes no more can be found. Now even a madrasa [Islamic school] student knows that there is no way but to learn English. (Faruk Karim, Chairman, Toke)

There was also a sense expressed that 'every language is an Islamic language'. (Maulana Mohammad Golam, Hafez, Shak Char)

In fact, especially amongst the Islamic practitioners (Imams and teachers) there was an emphatic sense that English can be used to serve Islam, and it allows people to engage with other Muslims throughout the world and to spread the word of Allah:

It would rather work as a plus point. Because when an aalim [scholar] goes preaching, he will be able to speak in both Bangla and English. (Fakir Ali, Teacher and part-time farmer, Shak Char)

Certain of the participants extended the argument to suggest that in fact the threat to society comes from not learning English, and that anti-English attitudes in Bangladesh were a historical mistake that had resulted in the Bangladeshis as well as the Muslims in India lagging behind in economic development:

In British period, many Hindus learned English and they progressed much while the Muslims thought that if they learn English, then, their religion will be negatively affected and they would become Christian. As a result, the Muslims detached themselves from learning English. Actually this is the reality. This is the reason why we are lagging behind. (Harun Khan, Chairman, Shak Char)

Concern for Bangla

While there was overwhelming support of the need for Bangladeshis to learn English, occasional concerns were voiced about there being a little too much use of English words in Bangla:

We know that many people have laid down their lives for this language. The way that we use English now, it devalues Bangla to an extent. More Bangla should be used in day-to-day conversations. It's not that I won't learn English. I'll have to learn English to gain knowledge. But we can't exclude our native language. (Maulana Mohammad Golam, Hafez, Shak Char)

Also, several respondents mentioned the importance of keeping up both languages:

It is very bad if you forget your mother tongue... Nothing is left if you forget your mother tongue. (Monohora Rani, Housewife, Shak Char)

Summary

The attitudes grouped together in this category were overwhelmingly—perhaps even naively – positive about the learning of English for Bangladeshis, and also showed an overall confidence in the integrity of the Bangla language and Islam. In fact, knowledge of English was even considered to be a positive factor in the way that it allows Bangladeshis to share their culture internationally and help Muslims participate in a global Islamic community. While historically there may have been a sense that English had to be rejected as part of emerging Bangladeshi nationalism and in order to reinforce the strength of Bangla as the national language, English is now perceived as being necessary for the development of the country. However, it is made clear by many participants that if the use of English were to come at the expense of Bangla, views would be very different.

English and social status

The focus in this section is on the relationship between English and perceived social status, as well as the esteem and value for the community that is thought to come with skills in English. As in the previous categories, there was a general consensus here: that a knowledge of English does indeed lead to enhanced social status:

A person who knows English is respected everywhere. (Sushma Bose, Teacher, Shak Char)

There were only occasional counter opinions to this discourse, such as:

There is no relation of language with getting honour or not. One might have much wealth, but might not have value. Whether a person will get value or not depends on one's behaviours. If a person is a good human being and his behaviour is nice, then he will get respect from people. It does not have any relation with knowing a language or not. (Harun Khan, Chairman, Shak Char)

But in general, knowledge of English was associated with many esteemed professions (e.g. teachers and doctors) and with going abroad and engaging with highly respected people - all things which award someone with higher respect and greater social status:

Someone who knows English and does teaching in a school gets respect from people. A doctor gets respect from people and it is because he could become doctor as he knows good English. Again, someone who lives abroad and knows English get respect from people as they live abroad. ... People who know English can hang out with good people, can talk worthy and behave well with people. These give them special respect. (Sumon Miah, Rickshaw puller, Toke)

There was also the impression that some knowledge of English can enhance the social status of even the educationally disadvantaged:

So, it happens that someone who is not that educated, but knows English will be considered as educated in the civilised society. (Ranu Islam, College teacher, Toke)

This view was echoed in the personal testimony given by the uneducated social leader Shak Char, Minhaz Udiin, who elaborates on how he uses his knowledge of English to create an esteemed identity for himself:

Minhaz Udiin: Sometimes, in some contexts, I prefer to mix Bangla and English. I feel good to do that.

Researcher: Why do you like that? Do you think that people give you more respect if you do that?

Minhaz Udiin: I revealed you very frankly about my educational qualification. Now, in other places people can't find out my educational qualification by talking with me.

Researcher: So, as you speak some English, people don't really think that you did not study much, right?

Minhaz Udiin: Yes. How would someone know about my educational qualifications? He hasn't taken any interview with me like you.

Some of the participants with limited formal education thought that they would gain more respect in the community if they knew English, and that this is another reason for why they regret not going further with their education:

It would have been better. I could go to superior places. I could talk with good 'sirs' if I had some more proficiency in English... I could mingle with anyone anywhere ... I would have been highly evaluated. (Devika, Cleaner, Shak Char)

Several people also valued English and had high aspirations for the power it has to make their children's lives better and offer them opportunities that they did not have:

I have kept an English teacher for them. I make my children learn from anyone who knows something about English. If they can learn a bit now, then in higher classes there will not be any problem for them. In this way I am planning their studies. ... If English is known to them then there will not be any problem for them. From every aspect they will be alright, they will not face any problem anyway. They will not face any problem like mine. (Monohora Rani, Housewife, Shak Char)

For those respondents who have a family member who speaks English, this is something that they are very proud of and that provides them with esteem, particularly because of the associations of the language with numeracy and access to technology. For example, Devika, a cleaner in Shak Char, mentions that she is 'adored by my daughters' father for knowing English' and that she is very proud of her daughter because she speaks English and because she is recognised for this in the community:

Even many elder persons respect her... many people bring their electricity bill to her and say ... can you see the bill and say where should the money be paid and by when?' ... when someone falls in trouble and visits a doctor, she comes to my daughter with the prescription and says, 'can you please see when I should have which medicine?' (Devika, Cleaner, Shak Char)

Here a knowledge of English was linked to respect because of the value Devika's daughter has in the community due to her ability to perform certain tasks which require English-language skills. Similarly, the following quote demonstrates that while knowledge of English can offer people various freedoms, a sense of prestige and self-sufficiency, a lack of English means that one is reliant on the help of others and therefore ashamed.

Suppose someone has a poultry business. Lots of information on the poultry medicine is written in English. If he would have read and understood by himself, he would not have asked for someone's help, he could try to read and understand by himself. When you go to someone for help but he's not at home, then many problems can occur. ... I know someone like this ... He is illiterate, he cannot do anything. He has a poultry business and goes to a lot of people when he cannot understand. He would not need to go to someone if he knew English. You will be ashamed after going to someone for one or two days, then you will stop going. (Ferdousi Begum, Housewife, Toke)

Lack of English, therefore, was seen as something that inhibits people's capabilities and contributes to their lack of status. Without English, people are reliant on others for access to the sort of information that they need to successfully run their businesses, and they are blocked from positions of prestige. Knowledge of English was seen as something that would give them freedom to act on their own and make more informed decisions and choices, and also a prestigious role in the community from which they could help others.

Summary

As noted above, here again there was overall consensus in the associations between English and enhanced social status. Knowledge of English was associated with education in general, and often a good education, with higher level professions, and with providing a service to the community. For those reasons, many of the participants wish that they had better skills in English and they make every effort to see that their children have opportunities to learn the language. In some cases, knowledge of English was unrealistically perceived as a general panacea that can make people's lives better by enhancing their livelihood and standing in the community.

Other issues: access and infrastructure

As a final point, it is worth mentioning that while there was overall recognition of the fact that English can be a useful skill, both within the community and beyond, there was also a sense that it is something that is beyond the capabilities of most people in rural communities. A common opinion is that English cannot be learned because of a lack of money and access to resources:

Many people have (an interest in learning English) but they cannot as they lack the money. (Monish Dev Barman, Fisherman, Toke)

Moreover, in some cases respondents contextualised English language learning within wider development issues and felt that it was just one of a number of significant factors in the process of poverty reduction:

... I am not denying the importance of English learning. There are many advantages of learning English. But prior to this, it is necessary to widen general education. (Harun Khan, Chairman, Shak Char)

To achieve success in any educational initiative, including improved language education, there was a recognised need for larger change:

... to benefit from speaking English for common purposes, we need to develop the infrastructure. (Gias Uddin, Banker, Toke)

These voices remind us that, while English language education may have some role to play in development, educational issues are embedded within a wider web of development needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The opinions collected in this study clearly indicate that there is both a perceived need and desire to learn English among representatives from several occupations in rural Bangladesh. There is also strong evidence that English is associated with modernity and high social status. English is seen as providing access to global information and international communities, as well as to better employment opportunities, both abroad and in the local communities where the studies were set. Within the study, speakers of English were viewed with much esteem, partly due to the value of the tasks that they can perform, and this provides further impetus for people to learn the language, and to ensure that their children learn it. And while attitudes may have differed in the past, English is not seen as presenting any particular danger to local languages, culture or religion. There is no strong evidence of English being perceived as what Imam (2005: 474) calls ‘a displacer of national tradition, an instrument of continuing imperialist intervention, a fierce coloniser of every kind of identity.’ It should be stressed, of course that the study has focused on attitudes and beliefs, and as such does not provide information about actual uses of English in various community domains, or of the power issues that result from the history of English in the region. (A topic of this sort would be a productive focus for future research.)

At first glance, the perceptions of the participants in this study indicate a need for further opportunities to learn English within rural communities. However, upon reflection, some of the data suggest that what is perceived as a need for English may also indicate a need for further access to literacy in general, a need for the provision of essential information in the national language or a need for multiliteracies in the national language. Moreover, as was noted above, it is important to recognise that this study is based on people’s perceptions and attitudes, and it is not possible to determine whether these perceptions are rooted in real experiences or are more the product of myths, and whether their attitudes capture actual opportunities or merely aspirations. In some cases, attitudes certainly seem to stem from the participants’ real-life experiences and suggest that wider access to English language education (and/or wider access to information in Bangla) would allow more people in the community to profit from knowledge of the language and would increase their options and choices and lessen the need for them to rely on others for important information and access to resources.

Another necessary limitation of the study is that it does not address other forms of cultural or social capital that may be needed to gain resources and positions of esteem and authority in these communities. While the participants perceive English as strongly associated with better quality of life and more respectable positions in society, this may say more about their frustrations and dissatisfaction with their current situation than their actual need for English.

The strong associations between English and development, however, suggest there exists:

- a marked need to engage in a process of awareness-raising about English language education projects.

And that within this context, it would be advisable for:

- English language teaching projects in development contexts to promote realistic views about what English can offer people as one of the (many) tools that can assist in international development; and that
- they communicate realistic messages based on hard evidence about the role of English in development.

To be able to do this, detailed empirical studies of how knowledge of English correlates with economic value in rural Bangladesh are needed. Future research could explore issues like the potential role of English in developing rural economies, or the value of English language skills for migrant workers who often provide repatriated funds in rural areas.

And while there may be a need for more realistic messages about the role of English in development, if people in rural areas strongly feel that learning English will improve their status in life and offer them greater opportunity, then access should not be denied. Beliefs about the role played by English can be part of the envisioned success that is required in order for actual development to occur. After all, achieving success despite the odds is clearly possible for the disadvantaged (see Erling, Hamid and Seargeant, 2012). Moreover, Vavrus (2002: 373) found that economic hardship among the students in Tanzania was tempered by their optimism, as they felt that English was valuable as a means of connecting them to the wider world and providing access to better jobs – if not now, then perhaps in the future.

Given that there are wider development and educational issues to be considered in rural Bangladesh, such as universal access to basic education in the national language, if the English language is going to continue to be promoted as a tool for international development, then it seems that such programmes should be:

- specialised and functional, and
- practically based in the needs of the community.

Ethnographic approaches such as those which inspired this study have proved to be effective in adult literacy education initiatives in development contexts, as they combine literacy teaching with the acquisition of other relevant skills for community livelihoods (e.g. saving and credit, health and family planning) (see Street, Rogers and Baker, 2006; Rogers, Hunter and Uddin, 2007). Such approaches could be adapted to the context of English language teaching in rural Bangladesh in order to gain an understanding of how English language education might complement local and national literacy initiatives and better contribute to development. By exploring the needs and aspirations of the local community, research studies such as this could be used as a basis for community language learning projects. In this way, participants could take ownership and control of their language learning, which could then open up a wealth of opportunity and information to them.

And finally, if English language and literacy education is to be provided, there is a need to ensure that:

- Bangla (or local language) literacy should remain as the first step in general literacy provision;
- any English language learning should reinforce Bangla literacy; and
- English education should have as its aim the use of the language to engage in a global community with the purpose of sharing and promoting local values and identities.

It is hoped that this study has contributed to the growing area of research on English as a language for international development, and to the broad aim of gaining a better understanding of how English language education might best assist development projects. In addition, it is hoped that the methods used in this study can provide a means for embedding ethnographic research into community initiatives for English language and literacy education in development contexts, so that participants can take ownership and control of their learning.

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Appendix: Interview schedule

Questions about background

Occupation
Family situation
Educational background

[other?]

Questions about English

Do you speak English? If so, how did you learn it?
Do you use it much? If so, for what purposes?
(e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening)

Do you know of people in your community who speak English well? If so, who are they? What do they do?
For what purposes they use it?

Do you think that people in the community want to learn English? If so, why do you think they want to learn it? For what purposes?

What kind of employment opportunities are there in your community?

Do you think people's employment opportunities are improved if they can speak English? If so, why do you think this is?

Do you think the learning of English improves the livelihoods of people in the community? If so, how?
(e.g. reading knowledge, access to information/media, communicate with people from other countries, etc.)

Do you think that learning English would help you/others:

Get a better job?
Grow the business?
Work abroad?
Earn more money?
Access to higher education?
Have access to technology?
Other motivations?

What effect do you think that learning English has on people within the community? (for example, does it have any impact on the way they act, the traditional culture, the other languages they speak/learn, etc.?)

Do you have any concerns that the learning of English by people in your community would change people in some way? (e.g. interfere with the local culture, religion, language)

What are the benefits of learning English?

Do you think it has any particular benefits in terms, for example, of social standing?

What kind of skills or education (in addition to or apart from English) do you think would benefit people in your community most?

e.g. Do you think that education/literacy is helpful for people in your community to get better jobs? How?

What kinds of development projects are there/have there been in your community in recent years? (e.g. literacy development for adults, school improvement, water, environmental sustainability, etc.) Have they benefited you/the community in any way? If so, how?

Are there any literacy development projects for Bangla or for other community languages? Have you ever taken part in these? What are your views about them?

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